

SPORT

Norway's Carlsen bags 20th world chess title

DOHA: Norway's Magnus Carlsen, the world's number one chess player, on Tuesday won the World Blitz Championship in Doha, days after victory in the slightly longer 'rapid' format, to secure his 20th world title.

The 35-year-old Carlsen's domination of chess showed no sign of weakening as he beat Uzbek youngster Nodirbek Abdusattorov in the final, securing victory with black in the fourth and final game.

Carlsen lost the first game but bounced back brilliantly with two wins using the black pieces, including a stunning endgame that many fans quickly labelled the game of the tournament.

Blitz games are played with three minutes at the start for both players, plus an additional two seconds per move.

Carlsen almost failed to reach the semi-finals after suffering three defeats in the 19 qualifying games, finishing third in the standings.

He beat the former world championship challenger Fabiano Caruana of the US in the semi-finals to take on Abdusattorov, rapid world champion in 2021.

On Sunday, Carlsen was crowned rapid world champion, where players have 15 minutes and 10 seconds added per move, finishing first in the regular standings, with the competition taking place without a final phase.

The Nordic grandmaster now has nine blitz titles, six in rapid and five in the most prestigious longer format, which involves more than 10 games between the world champion and a challenger.

Carlsen relinquished his long-format crown in 2023, citing lack of motivation. It is now held by India's Dommaraju Gukesh.

In October, he and the International Chess Federation (FIDE) backed a new world championship format that sets the stage for his return.

The new "Total Chess World Championship Tour" will consist of four events a year and will crown one combined champion for three disciplines: fast classic, rapid and blitz.

A pilot version of the competition will be tested in the autumn of next year, with the first full season set for 2027.—Agencies



LONDON: Arsenal's Martin Zubimendi (R) scores past Aston Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez during their Premier League match at the Emirates Stadium.—Reuters

Arsenal end Villa's winning run; Chelsea and United both held

LONDON: Arsenal closed out 2025 in emphatic fashion, snapping third-placed Aston Villa's 11-game winning run with a dominant 4-1 win on Tuesday to surge five points clear at the top of the Premier League as Chelsea and Manchester United wasted the chance to climb into the top four.

United were held to a 1-1 draw by bottom side Wolverhampton Wanderers, who collected their third point of the season, while stuttering Chelsea have won once in seven league games after being held 2-2 by Bournemouth. United are sixth, level on 30 points with fifth-placed Chelsea.

Arsenal avenged their only defeat in the last 25 games in all competitions earlier this month at Villa Park to take a firm grip of the title race.

"It is a beautiful evening," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta. "The way we started the second half was amazing, we really turned things up and were efficient in everything that we did."

Doubts over Villa's ability to live with Arsenal and Manchester City over 38 games were realised as Unai Emery's men were blown away in the second half at the Emirates.

After a tightly-contested first 45 minutes in which Villa had their chances through Ollie Watkins, Arsenal cut loose.

Arteta's men could rely on a set-piece once more to break the deadlock when Gabriel Magalhaes outmuscled Emi Martinez to score on his return to the starting line-up from a hamstring injury in the 48th minute.

Martin Odegaard's fine through ball then teed up Martin Zubimendi to quickly double the Gunners' lead four minutes later.

Two quality strikes rubbed salt in the visitors' wounds as Leandro Trossard and Gabriel Jesus fired in from outside the box.

Arsenal secured the points when Leandro Trossard fired home from the edge of the area before Gabriel Jesus came off the bench to add the fourth.

Watkins netted a consolation in stoppage time but third-placed Villa fall six points behind the leaders.

"I think it was amazing," Jesus told Sky Sports. "It's always hard to play against them... The mentality of the team is really, really growing and each game is growing even more and I think we are winning today because of the mentality."

Arsenal top the standings with 45 points, while second-placed Manchester City can close the gap when they play at Sunderland on Thursday.

United wasted another chance at Old Trafford to boost their chances of a return to the Champions League next season.

United striker Joshua Zirkzee made the most of a rare start by giving the depleted hosts the lead with a deflected shot from the edge of the box in the 27th minute.

But Wolves managed to level just before the break thanks to a header from Ladislav Krejci.

Patrick Dorgu briefly celebrated what he thought was a 90th-minute winner, but it was chalked off for offside.

"We struggled in all the game," United boss Ruben Amorim said. "We had a lack of creation... the fluidity offensively wasn't there. We didn't play well. When you don't play well with the ball, you struggle without it."

Wolves, who snapped their 12-game losing streak, have three points from 19 games, 15 points from the safety zone.

Chelsea failed to lift the

gloom at Stamford Bridge as Enzo Maresca's decision to substitute Cole Palmer was booed by the frustrated home fans.

David Brooks gave the Cherries the perfect start but Bournemouth quickly showed why they have conceded more goals on the road than any other side in the English top flight.

Palmer equalised from the penalty spot before Enzo Fernandez was afforded acres of space to fire into the top corner.

But Chelsea failed to deal with a long throw for the second time in the opening 27 minutes when Justin Kluivert turned in Antoine Semenyo's delivery at the back post.

The home fans made clear their frustration at Maresca's decision to replace Palmer with Joao Pedro just after the hour mark as the Blues remain in fifth.

Newcastle United secured just a second away league win of the season but were made to sweat after a dream start to beat lowly Burnley 3-1.

Goals from Joelinton and Yoane Wissa had the Magpies 2-0 up inside seven minutes.

Josh Laurent halved the arrears midway through the

first half and Burnley, who are winless in their last 10 games, hit the woodwork twice in the closing stages in their push for an equaliser before Bruno Guimaraes sealed victory for Eddie Howe's men.

A depleted Everton climbed to eighth in the standings by getting the better of former boss Sean Dyche for the second time in a month to win 2-0 at Nottingham Forest.

The Toffees had not scored since their 3-0 win over Forest on December 6 but struck through James Garner and Thierno Barry to leave Dyche's men just four points above the relegation zone.

It could have been worse for Forest had West Ham United not blown the lead twice to draw 2-2 at home to Brighton & Hove Albion in a game that featured three penalties in the first half.

arrod Bowen and Lucas Paqueta, from the penalty spot, scored before the break for West Ham, while Brighton's Danny Welbeck struck from the penalty spot in the 32nd minute but fired another off the crossbar. Joel Veltman scored for Brighton in the 61st minute to secure the draw.

—Agencies



NORWAY'S Magnus Carlsen holds the trophy after winning the blitz title during the FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Championship at the Sports and Events Complex of the Qatar University.—AFP

French duo stripped of Sydney-Hobart race overall win

SYDNEY: A French crew were on Wednesday stripped of overall victory in the prestigious Sydney to Hobart yacht race over a rule infringement.

New Caledonia-based duo Michel Quintin and Yann Rigal claimed victory for BNC in the overall Tattersall Cup, determined by a complicated handicap formula which allows smaller boats to compete with bigger and faster rivals.

But a race panel later added more than one hour to their finishing time after upholding a complaint by second-placed Min River over an incorrectly secured sail.

"Not in my wildest dreams did I think this would come true for me," said Min River co-skipper Jiang Lin after learning she had become the first woman to win the race, which was in its 80th edition.

"I did not have hopes of winning. You think about all the 100-something boats, all the big boats and superb sailors out there," said Jiang, one of just 13 woman owners and skippers among the 128 vessels that left Sydney Harbour on Boxing Day.

"It hasn't sunk in yet. Maybe I will wake up and say: 'Oh that was a dream'."

Master Lock Comanche took the honours Sunday as the first boat to cross the finish line in Hobart, ending LawConnect's bid for a third straight win in the annual bluewater classic.—AFP

Brazil club hit with FIFA transfer ban

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazilian club Botafogo were hit with a three-window transfer ban by FIFA on Wednesday for a debt relating to the signing of Argentinian international Thiago Almada from MLS club Atlanta United.

The US club filed a complaint with FIFA, claiming \$21 million in unpaid transfer fees owed by Botafogo, who signed the World Cup winner in 2024.

The sanction was posted on FIFA's Registration Ban list and took effect on

Dec 31, 2025.

Almada, 24, won the Brazilian championship and Copa Libertadores with the Rio de Janeiro club, which then loaned him to French club Lyon in January 2025, before selling him to Atletico Madrid in July.

Botafogo, a club purchased by US businessman John Textor in 2022, said in a statement that they are in contact with Atlanta United to try and reach an agreement.

"Talks have been put on hold due to the holiday season and will resume soon," the club wrote, saying they hoped to resolve the situation "before the opening or at the start of the next transfer window" in January.

Textor owns both Botafogo and Lyon through his Eagle Football Holdings conglomerate, which also held a minority stake in Premier League club Crystal Palace until earlier last year.

Botafogo and Lyon are both embroiled in legal issues related to debts.

Palace were demoted from the Europa League to the Europa Conference League this season due to Textor's involvement with both them and Lyon — who had also qualified for UEFA's secondary competition but maintained their place having finished higher than the Eagles in their domestic league last season.—AFP

Senegal top AFCON group ahead of DR Congo, Tanzania make history

RABAT: Senegal advanced to the Africa Cup of Nations last 16 as winners of their group on Tuesday, leaving the Democratic Republic of Congo facing a heavy-weight tie against Algeria while Tanzania reached the knockout stage for the first time.

Sadio Mane's Senegal, African champions in 2022, defeated Benin 3-0 in Tangier to top Group 'D' on goal difference ahead of the Leopards, who won by the same margin against Botswana in Rabat.

Abdoulaye Seck and Habib Diallo scored either side of half-time for the Lions of Teranga before skipper Kalidou Koulibaly was sent off. Cherif Ndiaye converted a penalty deep in injury time.

Ex-Chelsea playmaker Gael Kakuta, now based in Turkey, was in outstanding form with two goals and an assist as DR Congo saw off already-eliminated Botswana.

His backheel set up Nathanael Mbuku for the opener at Al Medina Stadium in Morocco's capital, and Kakuta then converted a penalty late in the first half.

Kakuta got his second and his



RABAT: Tunisia's Seifeddine Jaziri (L) tries to kick the ball during the Africa Cup of Nations Group 'C' match against Tanzania at the Rabat Olympic Stadium.—AFP

team's third on the hour mark and the Leopards then had a fourth goal scored by Fiston Mayele ruled out by VAR for a handball.

It looked at one point as though Senegal and DR Congo might end the group stage with identical records, leaving open the possibility

of a drawing of lots to decide their final positions.

In the end both finish with seven points from three games with Senegal on top by a difference of just two goals.

Pape Thiaw's team now have a kinder draw as they remain in Tangier for a last-16 tie on Saturday against the third-place finisher in Group 'E', either Burkina Faso or Sudan.

The Leopards, in contrast, must play 2019 champions Algeria next Tuesday with the winner of that potentially having to face Nigeria in the quarter-finals.

"We wanted a fourth goal to maybe force a drawing of lots, and we wanted to score as many goals as possible to try to win the group," said Sebastien Desabre, the Democratic Republic of Congo coach. "It wasn't to be but I'm not disappointed, I'm proud. We have achieved the objective of reaching the last 16."

Benin's three points are enough for them to go through as one of the best third-placed teams.

It will be just their second appear-

ance in the AFCON knockout stages, with their reward a tie against Mohamed Salah's Egypt on Monday.

Tanzania made history in progressing from their group for the first time, 45 years after their maiden AFCON appearance, by drawing 1-1 with fellow qualifiers Tunisia in Rabat.

Ismael Gharbi converted a penalty just before half-time for Tunisia and Feisal Salum levelled early in the second half.

Tanzania have still to win in 12 matches spanning four AFCON appearances. They squeezed into the round of 16 after two draws and one loss.

Tunisia finished second in Group C with four points, five behind table-toppers Nigeria. Tanzania pipped Angola on goals scored for one of four places reserved for third-placed teams.

Raphael Onyedika scored twice as already qualified Nigeria overcame 10-man Uganda 3-1 in the other Group C match to maintain a 100 percent record after the group stage.

Paul Onuachu had given Nigeria the lead in the first half in Fes and Uganda suffered a huge blow on 56 minutes when goalkeeper Salim Magoola — on as a substitute — was red-carded for handling outside the area.

Onyedika then scored his two goals before Rogers Mato got a consolation for Uganda as they head home.

Tanzania now face a daunting task against hosts and title favourites Morocco in Rabat on Sunday, one day after Tunisia tackle Mali.

Nigeria will meet the third-placed team in Group F — currently Mozambique — on Monday in Fes.

"We did not have enough time to prepare the team, but worked together with the federation," said Argentina-born Tanzania coach Miguel Giamondi, appointed only last month.

"I feel very proud, not just for myself, but for the country. To qualify is great for Tanzania. I hope this success will be a reminder to these players and the next generation of players of the potential of Tanzanian football."—AFP